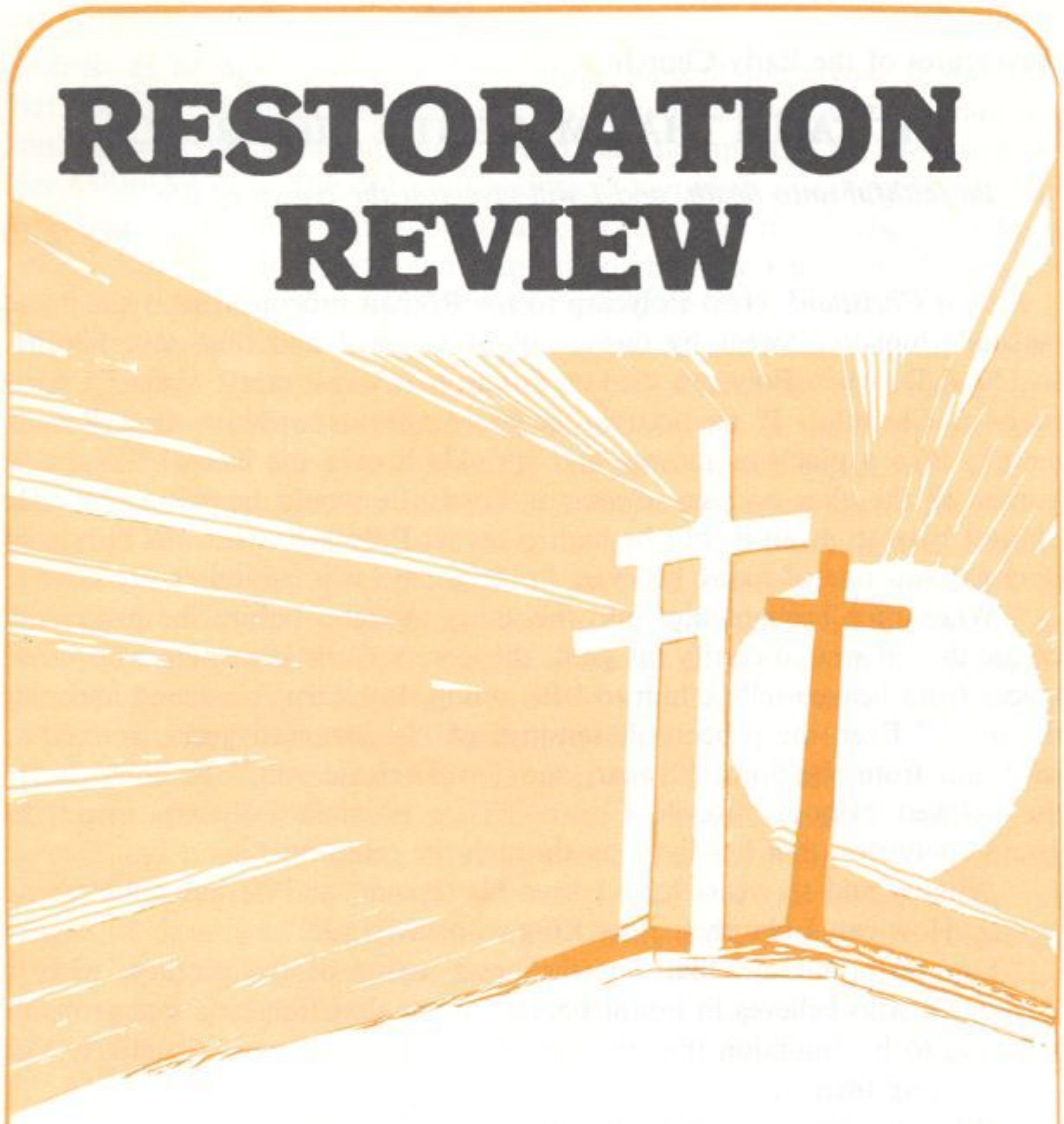
RESTORATION REVIEW



The problem of God's grace, of his active love, is a problem which can have no solution in the realm of mechanical or of legal relationship. If we think of God's dealing with us as personal, as a father deals with his children, we cannot neatly weigh out what is *given* and what is *received*; what is of grace and what of merit.

—*William Robinson*

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Adventures of the Early Church …

THE FAITH THAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE

Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. —Rev. 2:10

I am a Christian!, cried Polycarp to the Roman proconsul who sought to persuade him to "Swear by the genius of Caesar" and thus save his life. In 152 A.D. when Polycarp died as a martyr it was a crime against Caesar to be a Christian. If an accused believer in Jesus would visit a Roman temple, take a pinch of incense and sprinkle it over the eternal flame that burned at the altar and say *Caesar is Lord!,* he would be exonerated. He did not have to mean it, but he had to say it. Polycarp, who was bishop of Smyrna, was one of many believers in those days who wouldn't say it.

When they brought him into the arena to stand before the proconsul, whose duty it was to certify his guilt, there were Christians there who heard voices from heaven telling him to "Be strong, Polycarp, be strong and play the man." Even the proconsul, sensitive of his advanced years, wanted to save him from the lions. "Swear, and I will release you," he commanded the beloved bishop, "Revile Christ." That is when Polycarp made the grand confession that has lived on through the centuries:

"Eighty and six years have I been his servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me."

One historian says that was the great saying of the century, while a theologian who believes in infant baptism notes that Polycarp was probably referring to his initiation into the church in infancy since it is unlikely that he was more than 86.

What it should mean to us all who believe is that we here have a beautiful testimonial of one who was faithful unto death and thus received the crown of life. That is what Rev. 2:10 must mean, not simply that we are to be faithful until we die but that we are to persevere unto martyrdom itself.

The proconsul kept questioning Polycarp, postponing the crucial question. It was when he forthrightly proclaimed that he was a Christian that he was self-condemned. His faith was even aggressive, for when he was told to "Repent, and say, Away with the atheists," atheism being one of the charges against the Christians, he did indeed cry out *A way with*

the atheists- as he motioned toward the angry mob in the arena. It was they that cried for his blood. A city like Smyrna would have no more than one lion on hand for such purposes, and it had no appetite for Polycarp, so they called for fire. The old saint was soon bound to a stake and engulfed in flames. When the flames behaved peculiarly, as if to rebel at such a task, a Roman soldier was commanded to thrust a knife into Polycarp's brave heart and there he died, *faithful unto death.*

Polycarp's 86 years reach back to the apostolic age itself. He was around when the New Testament writings were new, when they were copied and recopied and circulated among the churches. He was in the Smyrna church when the book of Revelation was first unfurled, which began with a letter to that very church, having those words *Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.* He saw the church at peace in the empire, protected by the power of Rome, and then he witnessed the outbreak of persecution. He may well have known the apostle John personally in nearby Ephesus once he had returned from his long exile on the island of Patmos. And he must have known many who died for their faith, sisters and brothers alike who were faithful unto death.

It is estimated that during the first centuries of the church's great adventure some 16,000 were martyred for their faith. Such a witness of courage and hope had telling effect upon unbelievers. Justin Martyr, whose name indicates that he himself was martyred, was led to Christ by the witness of those who died for their faith. Being a philosopher, he continued to wear the philosopher's robe, and it was probably his fellow philosophers who rejected the message that he preached that were responsible for his death.

The most notable martyr in the post-biblical period was Ignatius, though we know little about how he died. Once tried by the emperor Trajan in Antioch in about 110 A.D., which takes us closer still to the apostolic period, he was sentenced to die in Rome. His journey from Antioch to Rome as a condemned man is one of the most moving in early Christian history. The ten soldiers who guarded him along the way (He called them leopards!) being susceptible to bribes, he was allowed not only to visit other believers along the way but also to write at least seven letters to churches, which are among the most important Christian documents outside the New Testament.

Some would pay a bribe in order to travel with the famous Christian for awhile, and for money the soldiers allowed the believers to conduct services with Ignatius. He was allowed to address the church in Philadelphia (in Phrygia) while chained to one of his

"leopards." That he could maintain such composure and continue to minister with such devotion while on his way to die as prey for wild beasts in the arena reveals a faith that defies explanation.

When we come to the New Testament period itself there are those examples of being faithful unto death with which we are more acquainted, whether the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7), James (Acts 12), Antipas (Rev. 2). But the number of martyrs, "the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne" (Rev. 6:9) was innumerable. Babylon is described as "the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Rev. 17:6).

The meaning of "faithful" in the context of martyrdom should liberate us from the superficial ideas of more recent history. Polycarp may have been the bishop of Smyrna, a practice in polity with which many modern Christians would disagree, but he lives in history as an example of what it means to be faithful, faithful unto death itself. Ignatius was not only a bishop, an office distinct from that of presbyter or elder, but was so convinced on the authority of the bishop that he insisted a church could not be a true church without the presence of the bishop, against which many of us would strongly protest, but there is no way to make Ignatius, who preached the gospel in chains and faced an agonizing martyrdom with a living hope, anything but gloriously faithful to Christ.

The *faithful* in "Be thou faithful unto death" is not doctrinaire, and so one may be wrong about some things and still be eminently faithful in what really matters: *devotion and loyalty to Jesus Christ as Lord.* The presumed "heretics" of the church, condemned for their truancy from orthodoxy, are often the church's most faithful sons, *faithful* in the true, biblical sense. So we can say that the faith that made the difference in the early church was strongly personal, centered in a Person whom it believed to be the Lord of glory. And so the faithful would never confess that Caesar was Lord, not even at the pain of death.

As I often did with my students in philosophy, we can better understand what a quality like faith is when we identify what it *is not.* We see what *faithful* is not in Peter's denial of his Lord on the night of his betrayal. The beloved fisherman denied Jesus with an oath and even with a curse, insisting that "I do not know the man." Peter had been "wrong" before, even dull and slow of heart to believe, if we accept Mark's portrayal of the apostles, but he had not been unfaithful before. He must have supposed that all was lost, that Jesus was powerless to deal with the forces that were destroying him. Peter's little world had

crumbled before his eyes. Fear overwhelmed him. He was led to lie and curse so as to save his own neck in a crisis that was too much for him. In his confusion he went away and wept bitterly. For the moment at least he had lost his faith.

In a few short weeks there was a dramatic change. Peter, along with John, is proclaiming in the streets of Jerusalem the Jesus he had previously denied. When the rulers who arrested them observed that they were "uneducated and untrained" they marveled at the boldness and confidence with which they spoke. That means that an untrained layman would be expected to cower in the presence of the learned Jewish clergy, but Peter, who had earlier trembled with fear when a mere maiden accused him of knowing Jesus, is now so bold that the proud, learned "rulers and elders of the people" are made to marvel. They came to see, as Acts 4:13 tells us, that they were behaving like Jesus, or "They began to recognize that they had been with Jesus."

That is not all. When the PhDs of the law ordered them not to speak to the people anymore about Jesus, their reply indicates that *they* were the ones in control: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

This tells us why Peter is now a different man. Like Ignatius and Polycarp after him, and thousands of others, he is now ready to die if need be for what "we have seen and heard." And so verse 8 tells us that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, one of the gifts of his faith that further empowered him. The heart of it is that the Jesus he once supposed to be a lost cause was now the Lord of glory: "whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead" (verse 10).

When Peter saw the soldiers take Jesus away into the night, he believed that he was no longer with him. After all that Jesus had taught them and after all the things he did, he was now gone, out of control. Peter no longer had his Lord! His faith was shipwrecked, especially when Jesus was dead and gone.

Now that Peter had "seen and heard" the rest of the story he was a different man. It was the difference that faith made. He no longer believed that Jesus was dead and gone. Jesus was now not only alive but he was with him, as if standing by his side as he preached the gospel in the streets of Jerusalem and even when he was threatened by the rulers. What Peter had seen was the risen Christ. What he had heard was *I will be with you always even unto the end of the age.*

Tradition has it, which is probably reliable, that Peter was in Rome at the outbreak of Nero's persecution, but fled for his life at the insistence of his friends. Out on the Appian Way he was arrested in his flight by the voice of the Lord. Here the tradition of *Quo Vadis?* was born in that Peter asked *Which way?,* and the Lord instructs him to return to Rome to die. Finally learning that he was to be crucified, he requested that he be placed upside down on the cross, for he was unworthy to die as his Lord had.

It was not only that the early Christians died for their faith, for men have always died for various causes, but it was *how* they died and *why* they died. They were *faithful* unto death. As in the Colosseum in Rome, to the consternation of Nero, they died praising God and even in death there were smiles on their faces. This is why "the blood of martyrs became the seed of the kingdom of God." It was the faith that made the difference. Faith beget faith, martyrdom beget martyrdom.

In time the early Christians received further revelation and created very profound concepts concerning Christ, such as his being the eternal Word (Logos) of God and "the very image of the invisible God," all of which they believed. But the great secret of their faith and power was their deep trust that Jesus was the living Christ and that he was with them. They saw him in life and in death, and they marked his grave. Then they saw him alive, triumphant over death as well as sin. They watched as he disappeared in the clouds. They believed the glorious paradox that he was both their absent friend and their ever-present Lord. In being filled with the Holy Spirit they were filled with the presence of Christ. That is why they could cry out *We are Christians!* even in the face of roaring lions and the burning fagot.

This is what *faithful* must come to mean to the modern church, which may one day be called upon to die for what it believes. And only this can be our bond of union — *commitment and obedience to Jesus Christ according to one's understanding.* We are to accept each other on no other grounds. If a person has it in his heart to die for Christ, if need be, as he died for us, then I should accept him as a Christian. Other matters can be discussed and hopefully resolved within the fellowship of acceptance.

If a man or woman will walk out on the floor of the Colosseum (or if it is in his or her heart to do so) and declare *I am a Christian* even in the face of an angry mob and ravenous beasts, then I can stand by his or her side in comforting love and make the same confession. And if I can do that I can certainly accept him or her in church as an equal in Christ. - *the Editor*

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The Changing Scene . . .

BACK TO BACK CONFERENCES ON FREEDOM

They may not have been called that, but freedom was what they were all about. When Church of Christ folk get together and observe the Lord's Supper on Saturday morning, listen to their women lecture on lively issues, and enjoy fellowship with a leading Baptist theologian one can only conclude that we have reached the bend in the road and made a turn (to the left no doubt!) toward Freedom, a city stranger to us than the New Jerusalem. A reckless freedom some might say, but considering the destitution of our self-imposed deprivation I will settle for a reckless freedom. History probably teaches us that there is no other kind, just as there is no painless way to follow after God in our kind of a world.

Since I sat on the committee that planned the conference for changing Churches of Christ at Central Church of Christ, Irving, Texas, I know something of the difficulties involved. Such a difficulty as getting out *the* word since no "orthodox" Church of Christ journal would carry a notice of the conference, even though it was unique to our history and eminently newsworthy. Then there was the risk of appearing sectarian in calling a conference of "liberal" or "freer" or "more open" churches, so we decided to describe what we had in mind and allow the reader to decide for himself if the conference was for him. While we invited certain ones in particular, we did not exclude anyone, and the Central church was careful to invite all the Churches of Christ in their area of the Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex.

We all prayed fervently for the daring venture and so we had positive expectations, albeit modest ones considering the risks involved. But the Lord surprised us with all signs on "Go" from the very outset, including glorious weather, which is always in question in a Texas January. If the Cotton Bowl had ice and freezing weather, we had a spring-like weekend, and upwards of 200 inquiring souls registered from far and near, even from Oregon and California and Pennsylvania and Michigan. Speakers and panelists shared their experiences with "the Lord of the winds" as they told of storm centers in their churches and gave "local weather reports" from their areas. Breaking into groups of ten or twelve, we had lots of honest talk about the church and the world, the nature of worship, the ministry of women, the values of our heritage, the problem of exclusivism. And we asked some hard questions, such as whether our people are really hearing good news and whether we are going to admit our denominational status.

It was intended to be a problem-solving conference, and the groups reported to the plenary sessions what could be called answers to tough questions. We agreed that steps must be taken to enhance the ministry of women, such as the conference itself did, even if women should not yet, if ever, serve as elders and pulpit ministers in Churches of Christ. And we must get with it in reference to social issues and help change our world rather than to let the world change us. We must be more creative in our corporate worship: suggestions included responsive readings, special music, and confessional statements, along with more praise and meditation. And we were told why our freer churches are inclined not to grow, one reason being that we lock in to a negative reaction to what has happened to us, and another being a lack of positive leadership and a following of leadership.

The greatest blessing of the conference was that folk who hardly knew others like themselves even existed were able to be together and encourage one another. I overheard one young minister say, “I am amazed that there are so many who see these things as I do.” Folk from the freer churches needed to discover each other and this was their chance.

The two most unique features were the presence of four women on the program, with assignments equal to those of men, and a Communion service at the close of the conference. The women, all as humble as they were articulate, were at least as effective as the men, and their presence gave a liberating flavor to the affair. We heard no negative comments about their presence, and we are confident that the majority of our people are ready for this kind of break-through for our sisters. The serving of the Supper, as deeply spiritual and moving as it was, caused some trepidation and there were some who accepted Jim Carter’s (minister at Central and director of the conference) invitation to abstain if they felt uncomfortable in breaking bread other than on Sunday. But Jim explained that “the Scriptures are not dogmatic as to the time.”

Most of those present not only celebrated the Supper together (by filing down front and taking the bread and cup from the Central elders) but considered it the high point of the conference. It was punctuated not only by moving hymns but by tears and embraces as well.

The Central elders were elated by the obvious success of the conference as was the Central church as a whole, and they are already talking about making it an annual affair. I consider it the most significant event in recent Church of Christ history and one that holds great promise for the future of our people.

The unity meeting sponsored by the Central Church of Christ in Conway, Arkansas followed the Dallas conference, and several of us proceeded to central Arkansas to be a part of it. While the Dallas affair was for Church of Christ folk only, the Conway meeting included several denominations. We were especially delighted with the presence of Dale Moody, longtime professor at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville. I knew we were in for excitement when he introduced himself with "This is the seventh denomination I have been with in recent months, *if you admit that you are a denomination."* Rather well-read in our history and an admirer of Alexander Campbell, he told us that he agreed with Campbell on everything he taught except two things: his doctrine of the Holy Spirit ("He was too rationalistic") and his eschatology ("He was a postmillennialist"). As the conference wore on I accused him of being more of a Campbellite than the Campbellites themselves.

Moody would have been disarmed in the Dallas gathering where the speakers and participants referred again and again to "the other denominations." I told him that Campbell regularly referred to "other denominations," that it was being a sect that he could not accept. "You cannot call us a sect," he told Mr. Rice in their debate, "for ours is a catholic plea. We have a catholic book, a catholic baptism, a catholic name, and serve a catholic table." Moody was intrigued by such eloquence.

I was of course pleasantly surprised to see that he had not only read my *The Stone-Campbell Movement* but even chided those present who had not read it. "How many of you have read this book?," he would ask, implying that they would know more about what they were supposed to believe as "Campbellites" if they had. He told me he especially appreciated my treatment of Barton W. Stone, whom he sees as the brightest star in our constellation. He seemed surprised when I told him that if we chose but one person as "the epitome of the Movement" it would have to be Stone.

Dr. Moody went so far as to say he agreed with Walter Scott's "five finger exercise" (faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, Holy Spirit), and when a brother who had studied at Seminary asked him if he agreed with Prof. Jack Cottrell that salvation has its source in grace, is appropriated by faith, and takes place in baptism, he said he agreed but would add one word, *usually.* Pointing to Campbell's Lunenburg Letter, Moody explained that we cannot hang hard and fast rules on God, for even in the New Testament, as with Cornelius, some received the Holy Spirit *before* they were baptized.

The professor also shared with us some Baptist politics, which included the Arkansas Baptist Convention passing a resolution against him, which, along with other pressures, caused his seminary to ease him off the faculty a little before his time. It is his position on the possibility of apostasy, which was recently set forth brilliantly in his *The Word of Truth*, that has made him a burr under the Baptist theological saddle.

But some of our folk had no problem in identifying with church politics and pressure, including a former ACU professor who was fired some years back because he would not join others on the Bible faculty in signing a creed. The professor has since served and been honored by a "denominational" school —that did not ask him to sign a creed! The Baptists are not the only ones who kick out their ablest and most courageous sons.

The Conway conference has now moved to the place that it is *practicing* Christian unity and no longer simply talking about it. To sit with Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians and share in the search for truth is what unity is all about. We are all grateful to Harold and Roxie Thomas and the College Church of Christ in Conway for causing such things to happen. Harold has announced that the third such conference will be held next year. You should plan to join us. —*the Editor*

History is the story of man's struggle to be free. -*Hegel*

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IS THE VIRGIN BIRTH PART OF THE GOSPEL?

I will make it clear at the outset that I unequivocally believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. The basis of my faith is simple: *the testimony of Scripture.* I am especially impressed with the account of Dr. Luke, who apparently did not write the *Gospel of Luke* on the basis of direct revelation from God but from his own research. And so he wrote in his preface: "It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus" (Lk. 1:3).

Those who have engaged in serious research could understand Luke's "having followed all things closely for some time past" as something like writing a doctoral thesis. He referred to various documents about the gospel story that he had at hand, which probably included *Mark* (which does not mention the virgin birth), but he was not satisfied with any of them for what he had in mind: "an orderly account" for his Greek friend

Theophilus. So he researched all the sources available and wrote his own account, which must have included interviews with older believers (he must have finally written about 85 A.D.), including Mary, the mother of Jesus.

That a physician, drawing upon the testimony of the woman involved, would write with such quiet assurance and great detail about his subject's virgin birth is all the evidence I need. The doctor states his facts crisply, identifying the mother of Jesus as "a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph" and then repeats her status with "and the virgin's name was Mary." In after years Mary must have revealed to her physician friend her feelings at the time and how she responded to the angelic announcement that she was to be the mother of "the Son of the Most High," for Luke records how the news troubled her and how she complained: "How can this be, since I have no husband?" She was told that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and impregnate her, that nothing was impossible for God, which probably left the young virgin as confused as ever. But she accepted it by faith: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38).

Then there is the testimony of Matthew, who makes it clear that while Mary was betrothed to Joseph "she was found to be with child before they came together" (Lk. 1:18). And the apostle saw the prophecy in Isaiah, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son," as fulfilled when Mary gave birth to Jesus.

There the testimony ends. Even though John writes of the preexistence of Christ and emphasizes his supernatural character, he makes no allusion to a virgin birth. And as factual and pointed as Mark is in his fast-moving, slide-like presentation of Jesus, he makes no reference to the virgin birth. These omissions puzzle me. We cannot conclude that these two apostles omitted the virgin birth because the other accounts had included it, for it is almost certain that each supposed that his account was the only record that his readers would have.

I see only two possible answers for the omissions: either they did not know about the virgin birth or they did not see it as all that important to the story they were telling.

Even more confounding is that the apostle Paul in all his writing makes no mention of the virgin birth, even though he now and again alludes to Christ's birth into this world, such as Philip. 2:7: "He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men," and Gal. 4:4: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law." We would expect him to write "born of a virgin" in

such contexts, but there is nowhere the slightest allusion. Is it conceivable that the apostle did not know the story of the virgin birth, or is it more likely that while he knew about it he had no reason to refer to it? If it be the latter, we can only conclude that he did not see the fact of the virgin birth as crucial as do some Christians today, who make it "fundamental" to one's faith, as if it were part of the gospel itself.

That is how I see the virgin birth, a fact of Scripture and thus a fact in history and in the story of our Lord, but not a fact of the gospel itself. The question we are raising helps us to distinguish between the Bible with its many important facts and the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ.

It is obvious from Scripture that the *kerugma,* the message preached, did not include the virgin birth. Now and again scholars, such as Alexander Campbell and C. H. Dodd, have listed the facts that make up the gospel, which have their basis in the list given by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:3-5. The lists may vary slightly, but they never include the virgin birth, for they are drawn from the apostolic preaching in Acts. If the gospel is defined as the good news of what God has done in Christ, it would follow that the *birth* of Christ (or his entrance into history), would be good news, but it would not necessarily have to be a *virgin* birth to be good news. It is *the fact* of Christ that is the good news, not every fact about his earthly sojourn. It is a fact that he was a Jew, but his Jewishness is not part of the gospel.

To insist that one must believe in the virgin birth to be a Christian is to go too far. We can all agree with the apostle when he writes: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9), but there is no such test of faith made of the virgin birth. One may believe and obey the gospel without believing in the virgin birth, which must have been the case with many of the early Christians.

With scriptural testimony in hand, as we have in the accounts of Matthew and Luke, we would suppose that one would have no problem in accepting the virgin birth, even if he is puzzled (as I am) that the evidence in Scripture is so limited. If, however, one takes a view of Scripture that allows for the influence of traditions, he could conclude, as some have, that Luke and Matthew drew upon a virgin birth tradition. This the writers might do, not only because it squared with some OT scriptures, but also because the story was consistent with the character of Christ, who must have entered into this world in a way different from other men.

It was the case with Buddha. Once he became great in the eyes of his disciples the story of his virgin birth was invented. A Christian could believe this about Christ, that his followers, seeing him as the Son of God, created the story of his birth, concluding that he *must* have been born in a different way. When accounts are written a full generation or more after the event it is easier for such traditions to be of influence.

While I do not have this view of Scripture, there are those who do who still believe that Jesus is the Lord of glory and the Son of the living God. They do not believe in the virgin birth but they do believe the gospel. There are those who believe the story of Adam and Eve to be myth, or "poetry" if you like, who still believe the Bible to be the work of the Holy Spirit. And so there are those who say it makes no difference how Jesus was born — for him to have been born just as we were might even enhance the story! —for it was what he was and is, *the living Christ,* that matters.

But this cannot be said of *gospel* facts. If one does not believe in the resurrection of Christ he cannot be a Christian. While we cannot make the exact manner of the resurrection a test for being a Christian, we can make the reality of the risen Christ a test, just as the Scriptures do. Thus the grand confession, *Jesus is Lord,* became the only creed of the early Christians.

Belief in the virgin birth may be more a matter of how one views the Bible, such as whether it is infallibly and inerrantly inspired, than a matter of one's devotion to Jesus as Lord. Some of the greatest believers in the history of the church, who never had any problem in accepting Jesus as the Christ, have had their doubts about some parts of the Bible. Is Martin Luther to be dechristianized because of his rejection of the book of James? The early church was centuries in accepting as Scripture such books as Hebrews, Revelation, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John, and many Christians lived and died without having these apostolic writings as part of their faith. The earliest Christians, of course, never had *any* of what we call the New Testament, for they lived and died before it existed. But they all had Jesus Christ, and it is *he*, not a book, that made them Christians.

So, we are saying that Jesus Christ is the gospel or the good news, particularly his death, burial and resurrection from the dead, and not necessarily all the facts that might be gathered about his birth, life, and death. That it was the Romans who executed him and that he was crucified between two thieves may be vital facts, but they are not necessary to the good news, which is that he died for our sins. The Bible, all the Bible, is the holy

Scriptures, but all of it is not the gospel. The gospel is the love story of what God has done for us in Jesus of Nazareth that was a reality long before there was ever a Bible, particularly the New Testament. It is better to say that the Bible reveals the gospel.

And can we not see that one might question something in the Bible, such as the virgin birth or the book of James or even several books as did the early Christians, and still not question the gospel? Most of us can appreciate Ps. 137, but I dare say that the last one of us has trouble in finding the truth of God in the last verse, which reads: “Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!” And we all find Ps. 139 deeply spiritual and meaningful, but we may have to admit that verses 19-22 could be just as well left out.

Well, I have made my point. One can be deeply moved by the good news of Jesus Christ without being particularly impressed with everything in the Bible. The church I belong to virtually ignores the book of Revelation, and all of us have our favorite portions of Scripture while finding some of the Bible meaningless. If for instance you get any hope for your soul at all in the three chapters that make up the book of Zephaniah, I would be surprised.

Once we see that there are things in the Bible upon which we might differ and still be united upon what is absolutely essential, the good news of Jesus Christ, surely we will be able to apply this to things that the Bible says nothing about. If there are things in the Bible that are no part of the gospel, then surely the things *outside* the Bible (where the Bible is silent) cannot be made part of the gospel, such as instrumental music and other such methods and accouterments of work, worship and organization. In our quest for a united church it is imperative that we discover what the gospel is.

Those who are inclined make the virgin birth part of the gospel and essential to being a Christian must realize that it is not the virgin birth that confirms the character of Jesus, but the other way around. It is the character of Jesus that gives credibility to the virgin birth. The miracle of Christ is not that he was born of a virgin but that he was born at all. The marvel is that the Son of God became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth, by whatever manner of his birth.

As I said at the outset, I have no problem in believing in the virgin birth, but if I should somehow discover that the story is based on an understandable tradition, it would not affect my faith in Jesus Christ as Lord in the least. What is essential is the good news that

God has made Christ “our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption,” and so I boast not in a book or in any doctrinal system but in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:30-31). — *the Editor*

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THE POTATO AND THE BIBLE

W Carl Ketcherside

The potato is pretty much a staple part of our diet in these days. With the proliferation of steak houses across the land we can drive in and gulp down a baked Idaho and a salad of our own construction and be on our way in twenty minutes. It was not always that easy. The potato, which is indigenous to the Peruvian Andes was brought to Europe in the sixteenth century. It created a sensation and was denounced from the pulpits of the land as a snare of Satan. Eminent divines argued that if God had meant for His people to eat potatoes he would have mentioned them somewhere within the pages of Holy Writ. In the absence of any such scriptural reference they were condemned by the silence of the scriptures.

This true account illustrates graphically the length to which men may go who make such a negative creed out of silence, and who argue that what God has not said is as authoritative as what He has said. It is one of the myths of the restoration movement which has managed to wield it so effectively that it has ended up with two dozen or more sects, each belaboring all the others as unfaithful and heretical. This points up the danger of adopting slogans as guidelines and substitutes for the revelation of God.

From the time I cut my eye-teeth on “restoration theology” I have been belabored with “We speak where the Bible speaks, and remain silent where it is silent.” I am prepared to prove that we have been wrong on both counts, but right now I want to deal with the last one. It is part and parcel of the baggage we have lugged along on our journey through life without ever stopping long enough to see what was in our spiritual carpetbag. It is so vital to our existence as a separatist and exclusivist people that to call it in question is looked at in the same light as hurling a bomb at the New Jerusalem. I have been reproached with the plea, “Why don’t you keep still and let well enough alone?” This comes with poor grace from those who are notorious for gunning down everyone who disagrees with them. It is like a bully who terrorizes everyone in his path with threats and then cringes and whimpers when the police track him down and surround him.

We have repeatedly heard sermons and read articles on “the authority of silence.” In my earlier and younger days, before I knew better, I preached a few of them myself. I am ashamed of having done so and have asked God to forgive me. I now realize that there is no inherent authority in silence. There is no fixed, innate, or existent authority in what has not been said or spoken. I shall deal soon with the false concept that it is the authority of God which invests silence, but right now let me say that the only authority which adheres to it, is the authority of the one who makes the argument. It is impossible to interpret silence, for nothing has been said which has become possible of putting into intelligible or familiar words.

This brings me to the problem of remaining silent where the Bible is silent. I will not examine the validity of the slogan for human beings, whose minds are already filled with pre-conceived notions, prejudices and acquired ideas. It may be that the whole slogan represents a goal toward which we aspire, something to keep constantly before us. The view that we have attained it and are now practicing it is a myth which renders our work ineffective, especially when we postulate that we are the only believers on earth who are attempting to do so. We have arrived just as everyone else is departing!

We did not come to the faith with our minds in a vacuum. Thousands of impressions, some right, some wrong, have influenced our thinking. When we accept Jesus as Lord we do not turn our minds back to zero. We begin where we are, absorbing new and refreshing ideas, correcting and forsaking mistaken ones. Some among us are so-called original thinkers, others would not recognize an original thought if it sat up and barked in their faces. But we are all the children of God and there is room under the divine umbrella for us all. We must receive one another and not seek to manipulate each other.

The fact is we do not remain silent where God is silent. We talk too much. We deliver sermons, write books, engage in debates, become angry, form factions, and slice the body to shreds over what God meant when He did not say anything. What we do is fill in the blanks and try to get everyone else to fill them in just as we do. We supply the missing words. We do not remain silent. We remain talkative. What we really mean is that everyone else should remain silent where the Bible is silent, and not interrupt us while speaking where it has not spoken. Our problem is not so much thinking to pray as praying to think. We are driving people from us whom God loves. As fast as He calls them we cull them.

The slogan has become a mere debating tool. Like so many other catchwords it was devised or twisted to win battles. And all is fair in love and war. The word “slogan” is from the Gaelic. It referred originally to the war cry of a Highland clan. Anyone who has heard it knows how blood-curdling it can be. It will give you goose pimples as big as little marbles. It will make your flesh crawl and creep. And our adoption of the slogan was intended to frighten members of the Christian Churches or the Baptist Church until they would climb the nearest tree when they saw us approaching.

I doubt that the genial and affectionate Thomas Campbell realized, when he used the slogan that the time would come when two dozen warring tribes would adopt it as their guide and ride forth to scalp each other with this rusty blade or bash in skulls with this tomahawk. Certainly he did not intend to use it as we have. To do so would have rendered his writing unnecessary. We have more sects than when he lived, and we have added a couple of dozen of our own, just to complicate matters a little further.

It cannot be denied that the use we make of silence is a very selective one. We preach it as though it were a God-given, all-embracing principle. But in our application of it we tread water like a shipwrecked sailor. If one mentions greeting the saints with a holy kiss we quickly label it as a custom geared to the culture. It is all right for Yasser Arafat on television but all wrong for us as Christians in the United States. The mere mention of foot washing gives us cold chills despite the words of Jesus that He gave us an example to do as He had done.

We are ready with a portfolio of arguments when someone points out that the scriptures are silent about the churches owning real estate. We have drummed up a series of reasonings which demonstrates it is right to do something for which we have neither command, necessary inference, or approved precedent. We have even developed huge financing organizations, great architectural firms, and church building complexes which will move in and erect a meetinghouse with the approved sign “Church of Christ” on it. But the word of God is absolutely mum about our huge temples of pride with their multiple rooms for this and that, including the preacher’s office. Times have changed. Once we inveighed against stained glass windows, steeples on our edifices, and crosses on our buildings. But that was when we were a frontier people, unwept, unhonored and unsung. Since we have become accepted socially, and can even elect a man to Congress, things have changed.

All of this points up the shallowness of our arguments. The contention for the silence of the scriptures is not a scriptural one. It is a myth to contend that it is. It is elastic enough to allow anything we want. It is restrictive enough to forbid anything we oppose. It is like a fence which keeps cattle in and allows hogs to go out. The content of the silence is dictated by the wish of the contender. David Lipscomb thought it was a sin to vote. Now a lot of folk think it is a sin not to do so. *—4420 Jamieson, Apt. 1C, St. Louis, MO 63109*

> When hearts yearn for each other with a deep and abiding affection, when brotherhood is conditioned upon common Fatherhood and fellowship is recognized as the result of mutual sons hip, unity will flow as a broad and tranquil stream whose crystal waters are furnished by the bubbling springs of thousands of quiet hearts.
>
> Then we will not need to argue every action and every faction, but love will triumph over trouble and we shall grow together in the bundle of life with the souls of all brethren, and we shall be tied with the scarlet line that flowed from his lacerated side. This is unity of the Spirit! —W. Carl Ketcherside, *The Twisted Scriptures,* p. 60.

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BOOK NOTES

We are stocking Robert H. Schuller's *Tough Times Never Last, But Tough People Do!,* a book that will inspire you to climb even higher, and it makes a nice gift. Only 6.50 in paperback, postpaid.

Conversions, edited by Hugh T. Kerr, is a collection of some fifty accounts of conversions from Paul and Augustine to Charles Spurgeon and C. S. Lewis - and even Ethel Waters and Dorothy Day! —written by themselves. I was pleased to find Barton Stone's eye-witness account of the great Cane Ridge revival. Our price is 9.95 postpaid, which corrects the previous price we gave for this item.

If you are interested in archaeology, especially in reference to the New Testament, we recommend an exciting new book, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, which tells about "the surprise" of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the archaeology of the Empty Tomb, of the Book of Revelation, of the Early Church, and much more. 6.95 postpaid.

In these days when many in Churches of Christ are taking a brave look at both our polity and our attitudes, I suggest a few titles by our own folk that have special value: K. C. Moser's two titles, *The Gist of Romans* and *The Way of Salvation* are 5.95 each postpaid; Olan Hicks' *In Search of Peace, Unity, and Truth* is 3.95 postpaid; Waymon D. Miller's *The Role of Elders in the New Testament Church* is as liberating as it is informative, 3.95 postpaid.

Restoration history students should get two reprints while they are still available: *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* at 21.95 and *The Campbell-Rice Debate* at 19.95, postpaid. And our own *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* continues to be read and appreciated at home and abroad, especially by the rank and file. The price is 21.95 postpaid, or you can receive a bonus copy by sending us eight new subs (you can count your own as new or renewal) at 3.00 per name, total 24.00.

Marriage in the Fast Lane, by Perry C. Cotham, is to be appreciated for its balance of theory and practice. It properly calls itself a survival manual in an age when marriage is having difficulty. Its practicality is touched by humor in such titles as "Is Your Marriage Holy Wedlock or Wholly Deadlock?" and "Are You Married 'Till Debt Do Us Part?'" And he talks meaningfully about sex, children, unfaithfulness, conflicts, and even old marriages. 4.95 postpaid.

A book soon to be published is *J. B. Phillips: The Wounded Healer*, written by his widow and assisted by a close friend. I look forward to this book about a very human and influential Christian as well as a Bible translator, for it tells the story of his lifetime struggle with anxiety and depression. To read current Christian biography is an excellent way to stay out on the growing edge. We will have this book by the time you send us your order, 6.50 pp.

Anything Michael Green writes is worth the while, including this new title *Running from Reality*, in which he argues that it is the agnostic, the secularist, the hedonist, those who build Utopias and take refuge in Eastern religions that are running from reality. It is a Christian apologetic on escapism in our time. 4.25 pp.

We will still sell you a copy of a little book that could change your marriage and your life, or we will give you one if need be: *Do Yourself a Favor: Love Your Wife.* 3.65 postpaid.

Our current series on *The Adventures of the Early Church* will encompass two volumes, extending through 1986, after which it will be bound in one book to match previous volumes. It is not too early to reserve a copy. Our upcoming bound volume, entitled *The Doe of the Dawn,* will have all the numbers for 1983-84. We will mail this book this spring to all who have reserved a copy with invoice enclosed. We are still accepting orders for this book and you need send no money.

Be sure to send us both your old and new addresses before you move if possible.

We get good responses from our bound volume for 1981-82, entitled *Jesus Today.* We will send you a copy for 9.00.

You can help us circulate this journal by sending us clubs of four or more subs (including your own renewal) at 3.00 each for the year. Otherwise the sub rate is 5.00 per year or 8.00 for two years. We hope to hold the rate at these prices.

If you send us *eight* names, total 24.00, we will send you a free copy of *The Stone-Campbell Movement* by Leroy Garrett, but you must request the book with your order.

Restoration Review, 1201 Windsor Dr., Denton, TX 76201

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READER'S EXCHANGE

I have been a preacher for the Church of Christ for three years now, and was raised in the church. I want to thank you for your thought-provoking issues, especially the ones on fellowship and unity. You have opened a new door in my spiritual pilgrimage and for that I am thankful to God. While in one of our Christian colleges I took a course in Restoration History, but we were never taught about the unity aspect of the movement. I am amazed to discover some of the things that Alexander Campbell taught and now I realize that most Churches of Christ would not hesitate to disfellowship anyone who teaches some of the things he taught. While it is discouraging that we have moved so far from such grand teaching, I am nonetheless encouraged that many of the Churches of Christ are breaking out of the old molds and looking at God’s word afresh and many of our preachers would like to see us grow in the area of unity and fellowship. —*Name withheld.*

Your November issue surpassed them all. I loved it. I read your stuff and get mad and think and finally have to admit you're right, even when I don't like it. You have ruined some fine sermon texts. This one I liked and didn't get mad even once. I especially agree that after death to this world, we'll be growing and going for the Lord, maybe on our own Star Trek. Only it will be much grander than we can imagine, as you suggested. *—Rod Cameron, Converse, IN.*

I recently conducted a three-week class on the Restoration Movement and showed the class your journal. Here is a list of those who are especially interested in knowing more about the principles which you discuss. *—Jerry Hughes, Dickinson, TX*

Many of these names are people who will read your paper but might not subscribe on their own. I pray that our people might come through these times focused more on Jesus and less on *the* "Church of Christ." *—Sam E. Lee*

(Some of our most appreciative readers first received the paper as a gift. You know people that would respond to what we are saying with a little encouragement from you. In clubs of four names or more, including your own renewal, the cost is hardly a factor at 3.00 per name per year. *—Ed.*)

If we deny love and fellowship to our Christian neighbor because he does not embrace all of our dogmas, we are rejecting one for whom Christ died. How then can we say that we love God whom we have not seen? Think!, please *—Steward A. Hanson, Sr., Long Beach, CA.*

A young business man recently visited our congregation and preached a beautiful sermon on grace. As I congratulated him on his open mind reaching a bit deeper than we usually do, he seemed very pleased. But an older member sidled up to hear our conversation and his changed expression said a lot. How our old brainwashing does endure! *—Rose Temple, Wallowa, Oregon.*

Just this evening I finished reading your anecdotal history of the Stone-Campbell Movement and I was so impressed with it that I had to write you. Of course you have been collecting the information for a lifetime, but you have put it all together for such a wonderful overview of the movement. Your questions and projects at the end of each chapter surely are thought-provoking, and I predict that your book will become a required textbook for a class in Restoration history. *—Louanna Bawcom, Searcy, Arkansas*

As a satirist I am inclined to rewrite Acts 2:38 so as to exclude divorce from forgiven sins. A Church of Christ preacher in Florida refuses to baptize any divorced person. That is terrible! *—Lee Keesling, Arlington, Va.*

(One of the impressive facts about apostolic preaching is that no such lines were ever drawn. While divorce was as common then as now, if not more so, the call of Christ was extended to all. It must be so today. Anyone can come to the Christ and be forgiven of any sins, whatever those sins may be. —*Ed.*)

I have read with much interest and enjoyment your excellent series on the Christian world view. I have thought of the Communist socialist ideology and the danger with which it threatens the world. Deeply involved in this humanistic ideology is the doctrine of the perfectibility of man, which assumes that man is basically good and if given the right environment can perfect himself. But the Christian believer sees this as a usurpation of the sovereignty of God, who alone has the power to bring man to perfection *on that day*. —*Harold Fritz, Waynesville, Mo.*

Your welcome publication arrives regularly at our house. It is like a monthly visit from the Garretts, and we relax in the comforts of our home and consider its contents. But do we the readers realize the work and research that goes into each issue. I'm sure we would be surprised and humbled if we knew the hours it takes both of you to ready the paper for mailing. I'm afraid we relish and glean the fruit of your labor of love without considering what we might do to help. The subscription price is meager, so we must show our appreciation by sending in subscriptions for others and an occasional contribution. —*Homer and Elva Matson, Jefferson, Oregon.*

My husband and I really enjoy the paper. We especially look for the reports on how our churches are changing. We, too, are changing in our thinking. —*Wisconsin.*

Since reading your *The Stone-Campbell Movement* I have become an avid reader of *Restoration Review.* I may have stacks of medical journals to be read, but when your journal comes I read it cover to cover that day. I have been frustrated by the subtle attitude' within Christian Churches/Churches of Christ that we are right and that there is little room for varying opinions. I long supposed that I was the only one who felt this way, and I once felt guilty for having such great fellowship with a Baptist brother. Your writings have shown me that I am part of a growing number among us who have the same spirit. —*Dr. Steve Plettner, Kulpahar, India.*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Writing in a Nashville paper, Steve North, an attorney in that city, pays tribute to his late father, Ira North, longtime minister to the Madison Church of Christ. He tells how his father told the church that they could find themselves another preacher if they did not accept the first black family that asked for membership. He might have told them that our first church in Nashville, dating back to the 1830's, was from the outset half white and half black. And this they did without the preacher threatening them —for they had no preacher! I was especially impressed that Ira said to his son, in reference to his impending death, "Don't take it too seriously." If we believe that life really begins at death, that will be our attitude.

Ensign (2710 Day Rd., Huntsville, AL 35801) had an article in its January issue by Normal L. Parks that counted the cost of the Collinsville lawsuit and found it very expensive. But Parks concluded that the price would be a bargain after all if it led the Church of Christ to reexamine the Bible teaching on the role of older men and older women in the church and to listen to its own pioneers on the evil of an authoritarian eldership. We urge you to subscribe to this seminal publication, the rate being only 5.00 for the year.

While we regret chronicling the passing of A. V. Mansur of Bend, Oregon, we rejoice with his wife of 63 years, Elizabeth, that he is delivered from his long battle with Alzheimer's disease. Many will remember him as one of our great free spirits, one of his battle-crys being *Let my people go!*

Lawsuit in Little Rock

The lawsuit against the elders of the Sixth and Izzard Church of Christ in Little Rock may eventually have a more crucial impact upon our people than the one in Collinsville, Oklahoma, for it is more likely to expose the extremes to which we have gone in creating a dictatorial, authoritarian eldership that functions more like a corporate board than like shepherds of a sheepfold. In fact the behavior of the elders at Sixth and Izzard makes corporate executives look like pikers. In recent depositions for the court they have avowed that they have every right to meet secretly, that their deliberations and decisions may be strictly confidential, and that they have no obligation to tell the congregation anything. Even from the standpoint of common decency and ordinary courtesy this is incredible and we may presume that these same men are not such absolutists either in their own businesses or in affairs at home. But mark it well: the chickens are coming home to roost! By our inane and anti-scriptural insistence on "being under the authority of the elders" (Is this in the Bible?) we have produced this sort of thing, and we must all take part of the blame. Elders are to be leaders among equals and servants rather than lords. The court may in the end rule that it should not interfere in the affairs of a church, but the judge is likely

to remind those involved of the principle of "the right to know," which is a matter of Arkansas law indeed of universal law. If I belong to any society that I help support or have investments in or am expected to make decisions, I have the right to know what is going on, otherwise I cannot make an intelligent decision in reference to its affairs. Joe Brown, longtime member of the Little Rock church, is to be commended as a "freedom rider" for asking the court to compel the elders to reveal information that rightfully belongs to the church. Since he made every effort to get the elders to reveal the church's business, he should not be bombarded with 1 Cor. 6, which urges brethren to settle their differences out of court. Tyrants in the church, who know nothing of the spirit of yieldingness, have taken refuge behind 1 Cor. 6 long enough. I also admire the way Joe Brown and his lawyer Bob Scott, also a member of the congregation, keep right on attending the church during this litigation period. "This is our church, too, and we can't be run off," they say. There is nothing like having folk around who love freedom in Christ even if it is difficult for those who choose bondage. I wish we had one or two like that in all our churches! —*the Editor*

Olan Hicks publishes News and Notes (Box 1253, Searcy, AR 72143), which tells of his ministry of healing divisions among Churches of Christ as well as his efforts to free our people from a legalistic view of divorce and remarriage. In his January issue Olan referred to the "Anti-Unity segment" among us as those who insist upon doctrinal conformity as the basis of unity rather than the biblical basis of loving forbearance. No charge for the publication.

The Disciple, official publication of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), in its February issue presents some grim facts about its loss of members: (a) the Disciples lose more members than any other denomination, keeping only half of those who are reared in the church; (b) their people do remain Christians, but they believe it matters little what denomination one belongs to; (3) those who leave go mostly to moderate or conservative churches, not to the liberal ones; (4) their leaders fear that their people have "a shallow ecumenism"; (5) they say the Disciples cannot be truly ecumenical until they find a way to be more attractive to conservatives.

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